



**A Report to the Community  
from the  
Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention  
FY 2010**

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**[www.needhamma.gov/health/ncsp](http://www.needhamma.gov/health/ncsp)**

Minutes, Reports, Links, and Materials Developed

**[www.needhamacts.org](http://www.needhamacts.org)**

Information on Suicide Prevention and Local Resources

## **Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention: Year Four**

The Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention was organized in May of 2006 as a community-wide response to the deaths by suicide of four young people during the preceding eighteen months. Four adult suicides were reported in Needham during this same time frame. During the Coalition's second year, outreach efforts were expanded to the adult population with a special focus on middle-aged men, seniors, and veterans.

Depression and suicide present one of the greatest health risks today for people of all ages, yet the public's awareness and knowledge about the extent and severity of this public health problem is just beginning. This report to the community will summarize our goals, list our accomplishments to date and summarize future directions that have been identified.

### **Highlights of our fourth year:**

1. The Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention hosted a meeting with four other Coalitions from around the state and Alan Holmlund, Director of the MDPH Suicide Prevention Program. It provided a forum to discuss best practices, needs, and develop a future plan that will include social marketing training and ideas for sustainability.
2. Project Interface -The NCSP has brought Project INTERFACE to the Needham community. Project INTERFACE collects and categorizes a wide range of resources related to mental health for the benefit of parents, educators and mental health professionals in the communities it serves. With the addition of this resource to the Needham community, finding the most appropriate mental health resources was done by experienced staff at Project INTERFACE and then provided to 123 families and individuals in the Needham community in a timely manner.
3. Needham High School's NCSP student group created a month long series of workshops and assemblies focused on student health and suicide prevention.

4. In the fall we offered depression screening at the Town Hall and the Town Library for anyone concerned they might be struggling with depression. Clinicians were available for follow up.
5. Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) trainings were provided to 60 new Needham Public Schools staff members and 145 adults in the community by the Adult Education sub-committee and the Youth Education subcommittee for a total of 205 new community members trained this year. We also had a teacher/coach from a private school (grade 7 \_12) and a Needham High School counselor trained in QPR in Wellesley.
6. Signs of Suicide (SOS) was presented to 8<sup>th</sup> graders at the Pollard Middle School and 9<sup>th</sup> graders at Needham High School.
7. The Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention (NCSP) worked throughout the year through outreach efforts in a variety of ways. The NCSP worked with local clergy, funeral home directors, local newspapers and television stations in developing supportive responses to local suicides. Media guidelines were distributed twice for the community regarding memorials set up in response to tragic deaths. The NCSP placed a 2 page ad in the Needham phone book focused on suicide prevention.
8. Other events for this year included “Resiliency for Adults,” a talk by noted author and motivational speaker Robert Brooks to the community and two trainings to mental health professionals on suicide assessment and practice.
9. The Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention has utilized local media to educate the community on various subjects related to suicide prevention.

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention is to work together as a community to develop and support effective suicide prevention programs.

Our mission will be accomplished by providing leadership and advocacy, bringing together and educating our community, and by reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors within a public health model.

## **Vision Statement**

The Vision Statement is an expression of what the Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention will accomplish in the next five years. Its purpose is to inspire involved and interested individuals to help the Vision become a reality. The Vision provides the basis from which the organization determines priorities and establishes targets for performance.

The Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention is a broad-based community group that reaches out to our town's constituencies, across the age continuum. It is an independent organization with a balanced membership that includes community leaders, professionals and residents. Utilizing the public health model of prevention, the Coalition works to define the problems, identify causes, and then develop, test, implement and evaluate interventions. Through the efforts of the Coalition, the Massachusetts strategic plan for suicide prevention has been adapted to the culture and values of Needham. The Coalition focuses on being proactive in order to prevent suicide. It is highly visible and has become an established community resource. Its programs are scientifically based and well integrated into structures throughout the community, making them self-sustaining.

The Coalition contributes to a community environment that helps all individuals to feel valued and supported. Our Vision is that residents at risk will be aware of accessible programs so that they can seek help and can identify a strong support network. Friends and relatives of those at risk will also be aware of programs and services. They will understand how to approach the subject of suicide when they have a concern about a loved one. The Coalition strives to educate and reach out to the citizens of Needham so that the entire community will feel comfortable discussing and confronting the issue of suicide and its associated risk factors.

### **Following the Public Health Model**

The public health model uses science and art to promote health and to prevent disease through the organized efforts of society. We adopted this approach to suicide prevention, focusing on risk factors and ways to reduce them as well as on protective factors and ways to enhance them. Of paramount importance to Needham residents is the value of working together to make our community a healthy and safe place to live.



## The Scope of the Problem

Nationally, there are about 30,000 deaths from suicide each year. According to the Surgeon General, an individual dies from suicide every two hours in our country. More adolescents die from suicide than from any disease or natural cause. Studies have estimated that there are as many as 23 attempts for every death by suicide and this rate is increasing.

The following are statistics and information regarding Massachusetts and national suicide rates and attempts:

- In 2008, 499 Massachusetts citizens died of suicide. That was three times higher than the number of homicides in the state. More citizens died by suicide than of HIV/AIDS.
- According to the 2008 Metro West Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 9% of Needham High School youths surveyed had seriously considered suicide, 8% had made a suicide plan, and 3% had made a suicide attempt.
- Most suicides occur among the middle aged. The most recent national data reveals that 51.3% of all suicides were among individuals ages 35-54.
- Significantly more men than women commit suicide. In 2008, there were 387 suicides by males compared with 106 by females.
- Although the highest number of suicides among males occurred in middle age, the highest percentage of suicides occurred among men ages 85 and older.
- Nationally, suicide among veterans returning from active duty in war zones has become an emerging tragedy since 2005. These statistics are based on the most recent available data.

## **Coalition Goals**

The members of the Coalition work in a highly collaborative manner. Their decisions are based on a foundation of up to date, accurate data. They approach their work with flexibility and an understanding that it is continually evolving. Focused Sub-committees within the Coalition provide opportunities for members to actively work on a specific challenge within the community. As we began our fifth year, the Coalition continues with the integration of the U.S. Surgeon General's "Call to Action to Prevent Suicide" into our local Goal statement.

Working within the fabric of the community, the Coalition will reinforce the ability of families, schools, churches and peer networks to help distressed individuals not to feel alone, to see options in their lives and to know they have a future. We have focused on the Public Health approach (based on scientific evidence) to prevent suicide and have continued to try to combine these methods with what we know about Needham's unique traits and values as a community.

GOAL #1: Make the public aware that suicide is a public health problem that is preventable

GOAL #2: Develop broad-based support for suicide prevention and related initiatives

GOAL #3: Examine and utilize the body of research on suicide and suicide prevention

GOAL #4: Implement evidence based educational programs focusing on suicide prevention

GOAL #5: Develop and implement strategies to reduce the stigma associated with discussing suicide and associated risk factors

GOAL #6: Empower the community as a resource for suicide prevention and fostering supportive engagement in existing relationships

GOAL #7: Improve news reporting (with a focus on education) and balanced portrayals of issues related to suicide in the media

GOAL #8: Implement professional training programs that help gatekeepers and those who are in regular contact with persons at risk to recognize, refer and respond to suicidal behavior

GOAL #9: Expand and improve systems to identify and collect data about those at risk

GOAL #10: Reduce access to lethal means and methods of self harm

GOAL #11: Develop effective immediate and ongoing guidelines for school and community responses to deaths by suicide.

GOAL #12: Document and report progress of the Coalition

## **Coalition Representation**

The Coalition is comprised of people with a diversity of perspectives, life experiences, and professional expertise. Because of this representation, we have been able to develop strategies that could be effectively deployed within the community to deal with depression and suicidal thoughts, attempts, and deaths by suicide. Coalition membership includes representation from the following groups:

- Needham High School students and parents of school-aged children
- School faculty and administration (Needham High, Pollard Middle School and District wide leaders)
- The Preschool Consortium
- Needham town departments: Town Manager's office, Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Health Department, Drug and Alcohol Prevention Specialist, Council on Aging, Youth Services, Police Department
- Local colleges
- Health care provider institutions: Needham Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital, Riverside Community Care
- Needham Clergy
- Community and civic leaders
- Medical professionals: doctors, nurses, therapists
- The Norfolk County District Attorney's office
- Local businesses including funeral homes

## **Working Subcommittees**

Coalition members have divided into three subcommittees, each with a specific focus:

### **Education/Youth Subcommittee**

The Youth/Education Subcommittee of the Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention has worked to increase the presence of wellness and resiliency themes in the curriculum and cultures of our schools and in the Needham community. A critical goal of this subcommittee has been supporting the suicide prevention programming activities in the High School and

Pollard Middle School through the SOS (Signs of Suicide) education program for students and the QPR (Question- Persuade- Respond) program for teachers. The work of the subcommittee has also included collaboration with administrators, teachers, and students from Needham High and the Pollard Middle School, as well as with the Needham Youth Services, Needham Department of Public Health and a variety of other community organizations.

Last March, in response to the NHS students' detailed feedback on a May 2009 student survey, the Youth/Ed committee, the Student Group of the Coalition (comprised of NHS students) and the Needham High School administration created an exciting month of programming. Named by the students, "Own Your Piece" month (the "i" in piece dotted with a peace sign), promoted students' efforts to both own and care for their inner wellness and contribute to the outside community, whether it be their friends and family networks, NHS or greater Boston and beyond. This year, Own Your Piece/Peace Month launched in March, with separate student and parent performances of "Dirt" in which actor John Morello brought to life a group of characters wrestling with family, friends, cultural and academic pressures, and addiction. Through this and other school programs, including for the first time QPR (Question , Persuade, Refer) training for seniors, students explored ways to recognize signs of depression and suicide and develop strategies for coping and for creating healthy relationships and lifestyles. New this year, is a parent –teacher initiative, entitled "Challenging Collaborations: What Makes a HS School Experience Great?" was aimed at increasing dialogue and trust between our teacher and parent communities. As well, this year our Student Group emphasized the 'taking responsibility' part of "Own Your Piece/Peace", creating venues for community outreach work. The student run "Crossroads" occurred for the second year at the Village Club in Needham in late May. Over eighty former and current high school students meet to discuss a variety of issues focused on friendships as a way to keep peers safe, being honest about mental health or substance abuse problems and the importance of getting help when problems overwhelm you.

Middle School areas of focus included bullying, safe technology use, and building a supportive parent community. We are exploring ways in which our Student Group can serve as mentors for younger students, including their spearheading a major remake of our current SOS – Signs of Suicide – video utilized in 8<sup>th</sup> grade health classes. A School-Coalition co-sponsored forum is in the works. Extending beyond the High School experience, Youth-Education is privileged to have several Needham High alumni collaborating on efforts to continue to keep open channels of communication between the Coalition, schools, and young adults. As Needham High's webpage is revamped, the Student Group and its alumni will partner with NHS Student Council and Guidance to maintain a webpage and connected blog, providing up to date information and resources about gatherings and programs related to both tragedies and wellness.



### **Education/Adult/Elderly Subcommittee**

The Adult Education Sub-Committee of the Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention continued to work to reduce the stigma of depression and suicide in the Needham Community during the fourth year of our existence. The Committee has also continued to educate as many citizens as possible on the signs and symptoms of depression and suicide risk and we have trained additional mental health professionals to ensure that excellent resources exist for those seeking help.

In the fall we offered depression screening at the Town Hall and the Town Library for anyone concerned they might be struggling with depression. Many adults may struggle for months or years with irritability, sadness, tearfulness, sleeping problems and not realize they may be suffering with depression. The short survey developed by “Mental Health Screening Inc” of Wellesley gave people the opportunity to take a five minute survey followed up by a brief consultation with a mental health professional. Those who score indicated they might have depression were referred to local mental health providers for a more thorough evaluation.

Throughout the year we have offered QPR trainings for local community groups, nursing homes, and to the general public. QPR stands for “Question, Persuade, and Refer.” It is modeled after CPR and takes the same general approach: Anyone can be trained to save a life by taking this one hour course that teaches the signs of depression and suicide and more importantly, to know how to bring up the difficult topic with someone you are worried about, and to know what resources are available in the area. During the last four years hundreds Needham residents have taken the QPR training. Trainings have been offered to teachers, physicians, nurses, parents, business leaders, nursing home staff, and town employees to name just a few groups who are now prepared to help their friends, family members, and colleagues.

Most mental health providers readily acknowledge their graduate education did not adequately prepare them to properly assess suicidal clients. On January 22<sup>nd</sup> we offered a training on Best Practices in Suicide Assessment to 56 mental health professionals. On April 9<sup>th</sup> we offered an all day workshop on “Assessing and Managing Suicidal Risk” for 36 Needham psychologists, counselors, and social workers. This workshop was designed by the American Association of Suicidology and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center to train mental health clinicians in the current “best practices” for assessing the suicidal client. The goal of the workshop is to improve the competence and confidence of clinicians when a suicidal client may come to their attention.

Another event for this year was “Resiliency for Adults,” a talk by noted author and motivational speaker Robert Brooks which over 50 attended. For further information visit our websites at [www.needhamma.gov/ncsp](http://www.needhamma.gov/ncsp) and [www.needhamacts.org](http://www.needhamacts.org)

### **Postvention Subcommittee**

The Postvention Subcommittee of the Needham Coalition for Suicide Prevention continued into its fourth year of operation maintaining its mission of exploration of the needs of the community in the aftermath of a tragic loss. One of the more critical links to residents is the media. Accordingly, Postvention has revised our media guidelines highlighting recommendations we believe will provide the most relevant and ethical dissemination of information through news coverage. These guidelines have been distributed to the local newspapers, cable television and channel 5. We received very positive and immediate responses from these groups, all finding the recommendations “very useful.”

An additional focus for our attention has been the internet which is another widely accessed resource. If you view the [www.needhamacts.org](http://www.needhamacts.org) website you will notice a new FAQ link. Within this link there are question related to **self** (Am I supposed to feel this way?), **family** (How can I help my family manage?), **community** (How do we prevent this from happening again?) and **resources** (Who can I reach out to?). Included are a number of thought provoking questions and answers within these categories aimed at helping residents reflect on theirs (or others) thoughts and feelings and know how to take action, where appropriate, in the aftermath of a tragic loss. Related to the idea of managing loss, the Postvention subcommittee reviewed, edited and developed new content to the High School’s manual on ***Resources for Faculty in the Event of a Student Death.***

We believe that “good” postvention is also “good” prevention. To this end, we turned our attention to the mission of reaching older adults and seniors, two groups who are at “high risk” for depression and suicide. We crafted a flyer entitled “Hope Begins With You” which was inserted into all local household water bills this past fall. The flyer included warning signs (“If you know someone...”), plans to implement (“Acknowledge, care, tell”) emergency and urgent care information (Riverside Community Care, local ER). Also included were local and national phone numbers (Needham Council on Aging and Samaritans) to provide resources for those “providing hope”. Additionally, in the fall of 2009 the Massachusetts Department of Public Health drafted suicide prevention plans for older adults. This Postvention committee is currently reviewing this document and will be suggesting additions / revisions as appropriate.

Lastly, we have re-inventoried and redistributed our resource flyer to all faith based groups, funeral homes, pediatrician and primary care offices, police and fire stations, BID Hospital and town wide events such as the Harvest Fair. These cards explain and are aimed at helping

to make sense of a range of individual response to loss. We distributed approximately 1500 of these cards in total.

This past September a calendar of important relevant dates for 2009-2010 was circulated by the Postvention committee to members of the full coalition. We identified national events such as suicide prevention week, potential stressors such as dates for College Board tests, the shortest day of the year (darkness and onset of winter) as well as anniversary dates of local tragic losses. This was done in an effort to maintain a heightened awareness within the community of possible times of increased stress.

## **Activities Year Four**

October 12	Depression Screening Day at Needham Town Hall and Needham Public Library – 14 screened
January 7	11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Stress Coping Group, employees, Town Hall with Larry Berkowitz and Jim McCauley, 10 Staff
January 14	NCSP Dinner Meeting, Membership Drive, Grace Lutheran Church 35 attended
January 22	Doug Jacobs, training on Best Practices in Suicide Assessment, Needham Public Library, 56 mental health professionals
January 26	QPR Council on Aging, residents, Carol Read & Deb Jacobs 14 trained
January 28	QPR Deb Jacobs, NHS Media Center
January 28	Advocacy Training with Ellen Connerton, Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention, Janice Berns and Tom Denton
February 3	QPR Grand Rounds/Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital Needham 25 MDs attended
February 9	MCSP Recognition day, State House. Meet with Lida Harkins and staff of Peter Koutojian – Janice Berns and Tom Denton
February 18	Report to the Community Part 1 on the work of the Youth Education

Subcommittee/ Needham Times Editorial Page, Beth Pinals

- March 3 QPR Facilitator Training in Wellesley - teacher/coach from St. Sebastian School and school counselor from Needham High attended
- March 16 Networking meeting with Health and Mental Health Providers at Paula McEvoy's home 5 to 7pm – 50 attended
- March Own Your Own Piece/Peace Month, Needham High School  
March 8 – “Dirt” – John Morellos program for all NHS students during the school day and Parents in the evening  
March 9 – extended homeroom follow up (questions for guided discussion and processing of assembly with John Morello  
March 15 Senior and Student Group QPR training 15 students  
March 24 Parent teacher forum entitled “Challenging **Collaborations: What Makes a High School Experience Great?**”
- March 18 Report to the Community Part 2 on the work of the Postvention Subcommittee, Needham Times, Ken Berringer
- April 9 Assessment and Management of Suicide Risk , Mental Health Professionals, PTC, all day training with 36 attended
- April 22 Report to the Community Part 3 on the work of the Adult Education Subcommittee, Needham Times, Jim McCauley
- April 26 Sharon Maxwell, What to Tell Your Kids About Sexuality” with Pollard/High Rock PTC and NCSP 100 attended
- April 29 Meeting of local Suicide Prevention Coalitions to discuss issues, needs and successes. Included Coalitions from the Northeast, Cape and Islands, Wellesley and Nantucket - 40 attended
- May 6 Robert Brooks “Resiliency in Adults”, Broadmeadow School, Performance Center, 40 attended
- May 13 QPR training to the staff at North Hill Living Care – 10 attended
- May 25 Needham Crossroads – a gathering of high school and college students for suicide prevention – 80 attended

June 10 QPR training Council on Aging Board - 10 trained

June 30	Year end report from Project Interface – 123 Needham families matched through intake to appropriate mental health providers.
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Despite these accomplishments, much work remains. We want to thank those who have supported the work of the Coalition, whether by contributing time or money, sharing expertise and resources, providing support and encouragement, or participating in focus groups.

## Coalition Development and Evaluation

To review a copy of The Development of a Community Coalition in Response to Youth Suicide visit [www.needhamma.gov/health/ncsp](http://www.needhamma.gov/health/ncsp)